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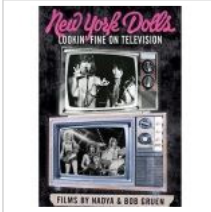


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by [Brian Robbins](#)



## New York Dolls - Lookin' Fine On Television

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HDTV? Not a chance, baby. *Lookin' Fine On Television* is a total black-and-white time machine ... perfect for capturing the New York Dolls in the heat of their 70s splendor. Filmmakers Bob Gruen and Nadya Beck have not only nailed what the Dolls were all about (if that can be done in 70 minutes) but provided a taste of the NY vibe of the times, as well.

Platform-soled pioneers of glam/punk/or whatever-you-wanna-call it, the New York Dolls were what you found when you opened the secret door in the back of the Stones' darkest closet: androgyny mixed with humor and grit that was destined to be legend just as well as it was doomed. The only band to have ever been voted both "Best New Band" and "Worst New Band" in a *Creem Magazine* reader's poll, the Dolls rocked, roared, danced, puked, and tumbled their way into a group implosion by 1975. The years that followed were good to some (frontman David Johansen went on to a successful solo career) and not so good to others (guitarist Johnny Thunders died in 1991; drummer Jerry Nolan the following year). Johansen, guitarist Syl Sylvain, and bassist Arthur Kane reunited the Dolls for the Meltdown Festival in 2004 only to have leukemia claim Kane three weeks later.

This past year saw Johansen, Sylvain, and the rest of the modern-day Dolls release a new album (*Dancing Backwards in High Heels*) and hit the



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road to play some live music. *Lookin' Fine on Television* offers both those who have just discovered the Dolls and those who remember the early years a chance to wrap themselves up in a fat hour of early-70s rock 'n' roll glory.

Gruen and Beck have done a masterful job of working with vintage footage of the band live – some of it shot in less-than-ideal conditions, for sure. Each of the 15 tunes featured makes use of film from various venues, with one solid audio track for each cut. It may sound like a potential train wreck on paper, but the end result is powerful and perfect. From Johansen's Mick-Jagger-meets-Marlene-Dietrich stage moves to Thunders' most savage chops and windmills, the audio and video stays amazingly well-synced – not an easy feat to pull off.

Tucked in between the live music are excerpts from two interviews conducted during the same period. Nadya Beck herself chats with the band (who appear to be sprawled on a hillside field overlooking a parking lot) in one; rock journalist Lisa Robinson is poolside with an animated Johansen in another. The group footage is the best, with neat humor and interaction amongst the band members – a reminder of why the Dolls existed in the first place.

Along the way, there are moments shot backstage and on the streets – both candid and chock full of mugs. There's footage from the Dolls' notorious 1973 Halloween bash at the Waldorf Astoria (they're introduced by the WNBC-TV correspondent on the scene as a "unique group of young men"). There are stage scenes from that same year where Kane can be seen draped over an amp in the background (arm in a cast thanks to a knife attack by a berserk girlfriend) while a roadie subs on bass. Bits from the band's "Lipstick Killers" video are spliced into "Bad Detective". And there are moments that are just sheer sweat-soaked jams: the utter reckless tumble of "Babylon"; the chunka-chunka-chunka rhythm workout of "Mystery Girls"; the set-ending chaos of "Jet Boy".

Don't overthink any of this, folks. The Dolls were a great rock band with no asterisks needed; *Lookin' Fine on Television* is proof of that fact.

As a bonus, the DVD includes a rare interview with Johansen and Thunders from 1976, shot on the

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sidewalk outside CBGB – referred to by Johansen and Lisa Robinson as “the Copacabana of the ‘70s.” By then, the original Dolls had blown apart and gone their separate ways. Johansen, mic in one hand and bottle in the other, is looking relaxed and chic; Thunders – shorn of his wild-assed rooster hair – is as cool and punk as cool and punk can be. “Catch ‘em while they’re still alive!” says Johansen of Thunders’ band The Heartbreakers. The banter eventually gets derailed; Thunders looks at the camera and yells, “Cut!” The screen goes blank.

It’s the perfect ending.

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